Soccer Safety

More than 200,000 youths under age 15 are treated each year in hospital emergency departments, doctors' offices, clinics, and outpatient centers for injuries related to soccer. Many injuries can be prevented if players wear proper safety gear and follow the rules of the game. Increasing the safety of the goal posts can also reduce the number of injuries

Tips for Preventing Soccer Injuries
To help your child avoid injury while playing soccer, follow these safety tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, and other sports health organizations. (Note: Adults should heed this safety guidance, too.)

Before your child starts a training program or enters a competition, take him or her to the doctor for a physical exam. The doctor can help assess any special injury risks your child may have.

Make sure all the required safety gear is worn every time he or she plays and practices. Your child should wear shin guards during every game and every practice. Shoes with molded cleats or ribbed soles are recommended.

Insist that your child warm up and stretch before playing. Don't allow them to shoot goals before warming up.

Teach your child not to play through pain. If your child gets injured, see your doctor. Follow all the doctor's orders for recovery, and get the doctor's OK before your child returns to play.

Make sure first aid is available at all games and practices.

Insist that your child follow and that coaches and referees enforce all the rules of the game. For example, most leagues prohibit sliding tackles from behind, which can result in serious injury to players.

Talk to and watch your child's coach. Coaches should enforce all the rules of the game, encourage safe play, and understand the special injury risks that young players face.

Ask your child's doctor and coach whether it's safe for your child to "head" the ball and, if so, make sure your child knows how to head the ball correctly to avoid head and neck injury.

Don't let children climb on the goal posts or hang or swing from the crossbar.

Above all, keep soccer fun. Putting too much focus on winning can make your child push too hard and risk injury.

Make sure the field and equipment are safe. Work with coaches, city officials, and other parents to improve safety.

Encourage your child's league to use waterproof, synthetic balls instead of leather ones. Leather balls can become waterlogged and very heavy, making them dangerous for play.

Make sure movable soccer goals are anchored to the ground at all times, not just during play. Goals have been known to tip over in strong winds or when climbed on, causing severe injuries.

If the goal posts on your field(s) don't have padding, talk to school or park authorities about adding pads. Studies have shown that padding on goal posts greatly reduces the risk of serious injury caused by a player's head hitting the post.

Who Is Affected?
With about 40 million amateur players, soccer is the most popular sport worldwide. It is also a sport associated with a fairly high rate of injury. In the U.S., more than 200,000 young people each year are injured badly enough to seek medical treatment.

For players under 12 years old, the injury rate in soccer is very low – less than 1 percent – but the injury rate rises with age. Nearly 8 percent of high school soccer players are injured in a season, and among community leagues, nearly 9 percent of players 19 years old and younger sustain injuries.

Older participants sustain more frequent and severe injuries than young players, and girls are injured more often than boys. Most injuries are caused by illegal plays, poor field conditions, or heading the ball incorrectly.

Injuries in soccer are usually mild – sprains, strains, and contusions (bruises) – and mostly affect the lower extremities. The most common site of injury is the ankle, followed closely by the knee. Acute head injuries are rare, accounting for about 5 percent of injuries.

Many of the most severe injuries are related to soccer goal posts. Goal posts have been responsible for at least 22 deaths in the last 20 years, and hospital emergency departments treat about 90 goal-related injuries each year. Most of these deaths and injuries have been caused by hitting one's head on the goal post or being hit or crushed by a falling goal post.

Injuries can be prevented if players wear shin guards, warm up before play, and follow the rules of the game. Changes in equipment can also greatly enhance injury prevention efforts. Most notably, the addition of padding to goal posts can reduce the number and severity of head injuries. Laboratory testing has shown that padding reduces the force of hitting the post by 31 to 63 percent.

Anchoring movable goal posts to the ground at all times, even when not in use, can also greatly reduce some of the most serious injuries. The National Federation of State High School Associations' Soccer Rules Committee now requires that soccer goals be anchored. The international soccer association (FIFA) is also considering making this change to its rules.